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ABSTRACT

To help improve school public relations programs, this handbook covers communications with print and broadcast media. An overview briefly discusses education's relationship to the media. Chapter 1, on preparations for working with the media, advises making personal contact with media persons and suggests how to prepare, what information to get, and what not to say. Chapter 2 considers news releases and discusses what to write about, knowing what to include (who, what, where, when, why, and how), finding the right story angle and lead sentence, keeping the release readable, using the correct news release format, pretesting stories, and getting the release to the media. Chapter 3 recommends how to handle crises, including identifying spokespersons in advance, using a rumor control center, keeping school staff informed, and establishing a crisis team. Working with radio, television, and cable television is outlined in chapter 4, which covers public service announcements, planning for broadcast media, and program production for cable television. Chapter 5 lists evaluation criteria, and chapter 6 briefly summarizes the handbook. Five appendices provide samples of fact sheets, news sheets, and news releases as well as guidelines for radio usage. (RW)

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

BASIC SCHOOL PR GUIDE

Working With The Media

EA 015 214

One in a series of eight school public relations guides which contain concise, tested and practical ideas.

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National School Public Relations Association

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Introduction

NSPRA's **Basic School PR Kit,** of which this guide is a part, is designed to provide specific, practical help for educators in starting or improving school PR programs. The Kit has been developed in response to the hundreds of requests for help NSPRA receives each year. Material on vital public relations topics is presented in the most concise, usable format possible.

The basic concept of public relations is explained on cassette tape by Edward L. Bernays, the man who pioneered the field of public relations in the 1920s. Important school PR topics are covered in detail in eight tightly-written guides. Additional materials are included in a resource packet containing public relations standards, proven ideas that work, and a PR planning guide and worksheet.

Altogether, the **Basic School PR Kit** is a short course in school PR fundamentals, a refresher for existing programs, a ready reference for dealing with problems that arise and a resource for anyone working to build public confidence in education.

This guide, *Working With The Media,* tells you how to meet and work with the media; research and prepare story ideas, develop tip sheets and announcements; write news releases; distribute materials; anticipate media action; and handle crisis situations. People like to see themselves, their neighbors, and hear their voices and hear their opinions expressed. Schools have news, the people, and are the focus of community attention. Learn how to make the most of it.

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This Kit was developed by John H. Wherry, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association, and Virginia M. Ross, director of school communication services, who edited the material. It was produced by Kim F. Hasten, manager of editorial and production services, with special technical and production assistance provided by Barbara Acosta, Jean Berger, Judi Cowan, Mary Ann Johnson and Norma Meyer. The graphics in the Kit were developed by Susan R. Eason of Eason and Associates and Kim F. Hasten.

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Overview

Daily, hundreds and thousands of people—children and adults—attend schools in every community. They study, learn new job skills, grow physically and intellectually, play and develop into future community leaders. These thousands create a wealth of information to share with the community which furnishes school clients and funds for buildings and operating costs. **But how do you get this information out?**

School news is published in school, district or agency newsletters and bulletins. But this news, if it is to reach the broadest audience, should also be funneled into existing channels of communication offered by the **mass media**—radio, television and the press. These mass media channels exist in every community—small weekly newspapers and large dailies, radio and television stations, and rapidly growing cable television (CATV).

Members of the mass media guard their first amendment rights of a free press and zealously pursue their charge as protector of the common citizen. This latter goal is often held above all others, epitomized in recent years by the dogged pursuit of the Watergate story.

Thus, working with the mass media is not easy for educators with little or no journalism background. There is a built-in distrust of the unknown, and a prevailing attitude among most educators that the press only prints or reports negative stories about schools.

These educators, and all those concerned with school news need to realize that the media is in business to make a profit. They sell advertisements and their charges are based on how many people "out there" use their medium—buy a paper, turn on their radio or watch a TV program. The goal of any media is to turn the public into devoted users of their product.

A key to developing a dedicated media following is to make the public feel a part of the medium. People like to see themselves and their neighbors, hear their voices and/or opinions expressed or read about them. They like to read, hear and see reports of activities of interest to them, their friends and their family. So, the mass media, whether a small weekly or a large daily, a radio or television station, features a continuous flow of local faces, names, and places.

Educators are in luck. Their services, products and "stories" meet the key media criteria. The community's children and adults attend schools or participate in school-related activities. These same schools are frequently the largest industries in the area—pumping thousands or even millions of dollars into the local economy. All the key elements of media interest are present.

So, why do educators feel they read only negative stories about schools? Why do editors and reporters call the schools only in time of trouble?

Media attention begins long before a call in time of trouble. Media attention grows from long-term media cooperation. That cooperation—professional give-and-take between school personnel and the press—**starts with the first contact**—whether positive or negative. It ebbs and flows daily. It strains in times of crisis and flourishes when good news gets out. Each frank answer to a touchy question bolsters a reporter's or editor's confidence in your resolve to be honest with the media. Each "no comment" undermines it.

In time, those that cover schools or agencies will develop a "feel" for you—how you'll react and whether you'll give them the facts or the runaround. If that feeling is good, they'll begin to call you for comments on current situations or for news leads when they're looking for something to cover. Most importantly, they'll begin to call you **before** they run unfavorable news about your schools. They'll begin to verify rumors before they appear in print, not when it's too late. **They'll begin to include your point of view as well as that of the opposition.**

Don't expect miracles. One thing the news media won't do is stop printing bad news. It's their job to print **all** the news. The community needs to know that too. But what you can count on is equal treatment—the good with the bad. How do you do it? Begin now to build a positive relationship with the mass media.

This booklet is designed to help you—whether you are a school superintendent, building principal, full-time communication officer or part-time volunteer media person. It will provide you with techniques on preparing material for the press, setting up channels of communication to develop an ongoing relationship of cooperation, and evaluating your media program.

Chapter 1
Getting Ready To Work With The Media

The first step toward good media relations is to find out about the media in your community. If you have just taken your position and are new to the community you need to know where to start.

Search the Yellow Pages of the phone book—look under newspapers, radio stations and broadcasting companies, television stations and cable television. Talk to residents of the community, teachers, administrators, secretaries and students. Ask them which papers their families read—which radio stations they listen to and which TV channels they watch. Make an informal tally of responses to your questions. You will shortly have a priority list of media resources for your community. If you are in a small community don't overlook the nearby metropolitan media which is undoubtedly read, heard and watched by a large number of residents.

Once you have a master list of the media, start making appointments to meet the editors and/or station managers. **One-to-one, person-to-person communication is, by far, the most effective way to make contact.**

At large daily newspapers ask to see the city editor—at small papers ask for the editor. At radio and TV stations ask to speak with the station manager. These are the people who, in most cases will make the final decisions on what will or will not be included in the paper or on the broadcast. They are extremely busy and in some cases difficult to reach—keep trying.

It may be best to send a written note requesting the appointment and providing a brief overview of the purpose of your visit; then follow-up with a telephone call to set up a firm date and time. Explain your relationship with the schools or educational agency and that you'd like an appointment to discuss how you can best provide whatever information each particular media needs about your schools or program. Tell editors or station managers that you want to help them—not that you want them to help you.

The editor, or station manager for radio and television, may pass you on to someone else—a suburban editor, an educa-

tion editor, a special assignment person. Go! You are interested in making as many contacts as possible with the media—your object is to get your "foot in the door." Keep the appointment and go prepared—do your homework.

Going Prepared

First, begin to read and listen carefully to the media that you will visit. Note the kinds of materials used by each. Make notes about special columns or programs that you feel might be spots for school news. Prepare an information packet for each media person you visit and include the following:

- **Your calling card** with your name and title, your school district or agency name, address and phone number. (Print lots of calling cards. Every time you talk to a reporter or meet a media representative hand out your card.) Be certain to include your own home phone number. Rumors and news deadlines do not respect the 9 a.m.-3 p.m. school day. If the media needs you and can reach you quickly, whether at home or in your office, they might call before pursuing an unconfirmed rumor and printing it, or airing it over the radio or TV.
- **A one-page fact sheet** with statistical data about your schools which reporters, editors or station managers can keep at their fingertips. Such a sheet should include the basics about your schools, district or agency: size, enrollment, budget, staff, grades, class sizes, average daily attendance, state federal and local support (dollars) received, etc. (See Appendix A.)

- **A short news release** developed for each media you visit based on your observations of the type of material they might use in their paper or on radio or television. If they indicate

interest in the release, take the opportunity to discuss it with them and ask for suggestions about future coverage. What would they like to have?

• **A media tip sheet** with three or four short teaser paragraphs of different story ideas from your schools. Some editors would rather have story leads that their own reporters can follow up than a multi-paged release from you. (See Appendix B.)

What To Find Out?

If you're going to develop an on-going relationship with members of the media serving your community you will want to compile a check-list of information from each of the media you visit. **Remember to ask:**

✓ The editor or station manager's name, title and office phone number(s). Some may give you their home numbers as well while others may give you the names of several different staff members to contact depending on the type of information.

✓ What mailing address should be used for your material? A post office box may get faster delivery than a street address.

✓ To whom should the material be addressed? Everyone has heard the horror stories of the copy sitting for days unrecognized on the wrong person's desk while the editor or station manager screamed for the release. Ask if your material should be directed to a **specific person** or simply to a **title**—"news director."

✓ What kind of material does the editor, reporter or station manager want? Ask what they have been receiving from your schools or agency and what they would like to receive. Ask about news releases, tipsheets, board of education notes and/or minutes, newsletters and other data.

✓ How far in advance do they want to receive stories? One day? One week? Two weeks? **When are their deadlines?** Make certain that you adhere to these deadlines religiously. Don't abuse them even when you have a fast-breaking story which you feel they will want. Give them the choice—don't suggest that they hold the presses for you or break into a broadcast.

✓ What is their coverage area? Find out the names of all the towns and/or areas covered by each media. Frequently you may have information that needs to be targeted to some spe-

✔ Who else should you meet? Chances are an editor or station director will suggest that you meet people in charge of various areas of their operation—news directors, education reporters on major papers, special event directors, sports editors and directors, and those in charge of the community calendar and/or public service announcements. You will want to get acquainted with as many of these people as possible. You will be working with all of them at one time or another.

What Not To Say . . .

Never assume that an editor or station manager owes you anything. You are starting fresh and building a professional relationship.

- Avoid "killer phrases"—"All the other papers (stations) are doing it;" or "Your boss is an old friend of my family . . . ." These comments will make certain that your material is the last to be used.
- Don't ever ask to review an editor's or reporter's story before it is used. And, don't threaten a lawsuit or to "go to the top" to try to get your way. In making such appeals you are on tenuous ground at best and reporters and editors know it.
- Don't forget the old theory that "where there is smoke there is fire." Any reporter or editor getting an extreme reaction to a question about a story will quickly assume that there must be something of substance to the concern.
- The best guideline for "off the record" comments is **don't.** Make no statements you wouldn't want published.
- Don't tell editors and/or reporters that you have the perfect story that all their readers or listeners will like. It's their job to know what is good for their customers—what they will like and read or listen to. Give your information and let the media pick and choose.

After meeting with the editor or station manager invite him or her to visit your schools or agency. Compile all the information you have gathered and put the names of all the media people on your special distribution mailing list. You now have a customized, targeted media distribution list, one that will serve you well in the months ahead.

Chapter 2
The News Release: The Starting Point

Time was when nearly all a school superintendent or information officer had to do to assure coverage of school news was to furnish editors and station managers with a constant flow of interesting, well-written material which they could count on to arrive on schedule.

But times have changed. The competition for space in most newspapers and for radio and television broadcast time has doubled and doubled again in the past decade. Spiraling costs of newsprint and distribution of papers have sharply reduced the issues and pages. The "news hole"—that part of the paper left to the editor for news after ads, features and standing columns—is getting smaller and smaller. Advertising, so necessary for radio and television stations, is taking up more and more of the time formerly set aside for "public service" news and programs—which run free.

That material which does get published in newspapers or aired and seen over radio and television must be concise, clear and relevant to specific readers, listeners and viewers. The way to do this is through a well-written **news release** (not a press release which is for print only.)

> You send out a *news release* to members of the *news media* —not the press. You may hold a *news conference*, not a press conference. Semantics, yes, but do you want your material used or not?

What To Write About

Schools and education agencies are literally overflowing with stories waiting to be written or developed into special radio or television programs. Here are a few suggestions to get started:

- Enrollment trends
- Transportation programs
- Student health programs
- Music and Art education
- School science
- Ways parents can help their child learn
- Special education programs
- Importance of pre-school programs
- Grade reporting
- Vocational programs
- Reading programs
- Student honors and achievements
- Testing programs
- Community use of schools
- Finance Information—local, state and federal monies
- Rising energy costs
- Importance of support staff
- Sports and drama

Finding Out What's Happening

Finding out what's going on so that you can keep on top of it and get the news to the media **before an event takes place**—rather than afterwards—is one of the hardest parts of an information program. Here are several ideas that work:

- **Set up a news gathering network.** Recruit teachers, administrators, board members, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, school volunteers and even students to serve as your "reporters." Conduct a "news workshop" to help your reporters learn to cover news stories and get the facts you need. Many schools and agencies publish simple how-to booklets about news gathering and reporting to help these reporters.
- **Develop a news release request form.** (See Appendix C.) The form should request the who, what, when, where and how of any story.
- **Interview your "front lines" of information regularly**—school secretaries, switchboard operators, bus drivers as well as key administrators, principals and teachers. These people receive and answer myriad questions daily. A survey of the kinds of questions they receive can indicate what you need to cover in upcoming news releases.
- **Keep your ears and eyes open.** Eat lunch with different people. Talk with anyone who'll listen. Constantly ask people

what's new or if anything interesting is happening to them—in their school, classroom, among students they know, etc. Don't forget to ask what concerns they have—what rumors they are hearing on the grapevine. Their information may be the tip of the iceberg and point to an area you need to cover.

Preparing to Write a Story—Your News Release

Begin collecting facts for your news release by rooting for the five Ws and the H:

- WHO is the story about or who is announcing it?
- WHAT is happening or being announced?
- WHERE is it happening?
- WHY is it happening?
- WHEN is it happening?
- HOW will it happen or how will it affect the public?

Not all stories will necessarily answer all six points, but the majority will cover most. Use names in your stories, spell them correctly and include addresses and titles when necessary. People like to hear and read stories about other people. You can liven up stories about finances, building programs, etc., if you include quotes and comments from people involved, responsible or interested. And, don't forget that a picture is often worth a thousand words.

Using Quotations . . .

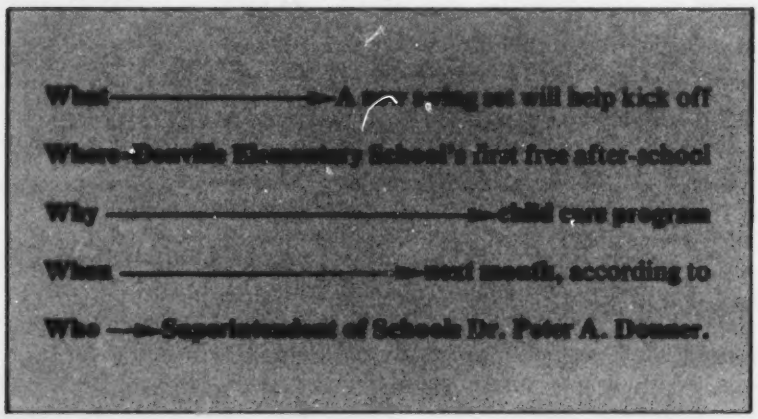
Actual quotes liven up any story or broadcast. If you don't take shorthand and find it difficult to capture exact quotes of someone you interview, use a recorder. This also provides you with instant radio broadcast material. And, a tape of an interview helps you check facts as well as bring extra color and vitality to your news story.

Find an Angle for Your Story . . .

Editors look for items that will interest their readers. They look for stories that are innovative, superlative, creative or beneficial. They look for stories that are out of the ordinary, funny, of genuine human interest—ones that will grab their readers, listeners or viewers and hold their interest.

Finding the Right Lead . . .

Find a special angle for your story. Re-read your first paragraph and read your opening sentence one more time; this sentence is your **lead.** Does it lead your reader into the story or away. If you have a good lead the editor or station manager will be grabbed—it will cajole or at least inform. The simplest lead and the one used for most basic news releases strings together the most important of the five Ws. Try this:



Note that the above lead had what are called editor-catching buzz words: **new and free** . . . that's a bonus to earn editor interest.

Avoid a lead that starts: "Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Charles Moore announced today that . . ." You have probably lost your readers and the editors. Go over your material and find the important item of the story and **put it up front.** If you want to quote the superintendent do so later—and omit his doctorate degree (See Stylebook references on page 14.)

Finishing the News Release

Once you've got your lead settled finish your story using the **inverted pyramid style**—with the most important material at the

beginning of the story and closing with the least important. That way you capture the 30-3-30 concept.

> The 30-minute readers are scarce compared with the 30-second readers who merely glance at copy and the 3-minute readers who scan it!

With shrinking time and/or space allocated to news whether in the press or over radio and television, your copy will probably be shortened before it is used. If your news release is prepared in the inverted pyramid style, your best information placed on top will probably not be affected by cuts.

USING PICTURES TO TELL YOUR STORY

Don't be afraid to submit pictures to local newspapers or TV stations, but be certain you check with them to find out what they want and will take. Most editors and station managers welcome good clear pictures to illustrate a story. Frequently a short cutline and a good picture can tell the whole story. With the changes in printing processes, most newspapers accept 5" x 7" pictures. Some with offset printing process will even take color pictures and good Polaroid film. However, if the picture is not clear, well balanced and attractive, forget it.

TV stations will accept top quality 35mm "horizontal" slides and in some cases video-cassettes. (For additional information on preparing material for TV see page 21 of this booklet.)

A word of caution. Some large newspapers and television stations have strict regulations about using only photographs or film footage taken by their staff. You will want to check on policies covering this.

Make Sure It's Readable . . .

Avoid jargon—educationese—like the plague. Re-read your finished material with a red pencil in hand and mark out those complicated technical words which **obfuscate**—and don't communicate. Keep your sentences short. Choose active "doing" verbs in the active voice over "being" verbs in the passive voice. And, watch the level on which you write. The average American reads at the 9th grade level. Use the readership index below to check the grade level on which you are now writing.

In preparing a news release, it is strongly recommended that you consult either the *Stylebook of the United Press International* (UPI) or the *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (AP). These books are used by most newspapers and wire services to resolve questions of style and usage. The UPI book is available by writing to Newswire Stylebook, United Press International, 220 E. 42nd

St., New York, N.Y. 10017. Single copy price is $2.75. To order the AP book, write to AP Newsfeatures Department, 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020. Single copy price is $4.75.

Format for Your News Release . . .

An important part of your news release comes from the way it is "dressed." A professionally "dressed" news release builds expectations for a professionally prepared news story. (See Appendix D.)

Keep these essential points in mind:

- At the top of each release include the name of the school or district, address and telephone number and name of person to contact for further information—add the home phone number for after-hours contact.

- Use a good grade of paper—8½" x 11"—and double space your typing. **Never** send a carbon copy of a release—editors will wonder who you thought deserved the original. Use xerox copies, but avoid the use of purple-on-white spirit process copies if at all possible.

- Always include the date the material is to be released: "Immediate Release"—"Tuesday, December 3, 1980." Include **year** as well as day and month. Old releases sometimes turn up like gremlins and cause embarrassing confusion if not accurately dated.

- Don't stipulate a future date or time on your release unless there's a very special reason, such as an embargo from the state department of education to release statewide test scores, etc. Stories marked "hold for Tuesday release" to give the weekly newspapers a fair chance will only anger editors at dailies and news directors in radio and television stations. And there is no guarantee that holds and embargos will be honored by editors anyway. You can actually count on the embargo being broken if editors feel the only reason for the hold in the first place was to give competitive media a jump on the story.

Preparing Your Material . . .

Use these steps to make your material more acceptable to the media:

- Don't abbreviate words other than those commonly abbreviated: Mr., Mrs., Dr.,Ms.
- When typing your release, don't break a word at the end of the line, don't break a sentence or paragraph at the end of a page.
- At the end of each page type . . ."more". . . if the story is to continue. At the top of each fresh page type one or two key words—slug lines—so the editor knows which story a sheet goes with—**"Closing Schools—add 2."**
- Avoid the habit of stapling multiple pages together—use a clip.
- Proofread your material carefully. Have someone else who has not seen it before proof it for you. (It is very difficult to find your own mistakes.)

Pretest Your Stories

No corporation or advertising agency worth its fee would consider rolling out a new product without pretesting it in the marketplace. But too often school news stories, many of critical importance relating to proposed bond issues or operating levies, student test score results, closing schools, etc., are distributed without a pretest. Of course it is impossible to pretest all news releases nor is it needed. But those that could have a real impact on the community should be pretested.

Develop a group of people you can trust as your "test corps" —secretaries, custodians, administrators, teachers, a community resident—a cross-section of your readership, viewers and/or listeners. What they don't understand won't be understood by the public either. Take their advice and re-work your copy.

You can pick up an extra bonus with your "test corps." This group will think highly of you and your program because you thought enough of them to ask their opinion and involve them in your work. That support and respect will pay dividends someday and the investment doesn't cost a cent to earn.

PUBLIC EVENTS

One type of news very much in demand by editors is the announcement of events which are free and open to the public. Plays, speakers, choral concerts, lectures, special celebrations and other such events offered by schools or agencies make excellent listings in weekend guides of newspapers or over community bulletin board announcements on radio and television. Find out how your local media would like you to handle these announcements. Such items are usually only one or two sentences long, but include all the basic information.

Who ——→ **Denville Elementary School** will present its

What ——→ **annual Christmas concert**

Where ——→ **in the school auditorium**

When →**on Wednesday, December 13, 1980, at 8 p.m.** The

Cost ——→ concert will be **free and open to the public;**

Why →**donations will be accepted for the children's home.**

Getting It There . . .

When you have completed the news release you have one final hurdle. How will you send the story so that it reaches its destination? Check these suggestions:

- Hand carry the material to press, radio and television when you have time. You may be able to catch a quick visit with the editor or reporters and build additional rapport.
- Use first class mail and use a postage meter rather than stamps—metered mail bypasses the cancelling machine at the local post office and frequently results in a time saving.
- Individually type, or have sets of such typed envelopes pre-

pared in advance for your "distribution list of media contacts." You can have envelopes for the list printed up at the start of each year. Or, you can prepare label masters for the list with self-adhesive labels which can go on a photocopying machine.

- Be careful about sending the same news release to different people at the same newspaper, radio or television station. If you do this for practical reasons—one person needs the release for a news item, another for the weekend calendar—attach a note to each copy indicating where the other copies have gone.

A special rubber stamp made up to call attention to your material may be worth considering. When a story mentions a person from the local coverage area, a stamp in red on the front of the envelope draws attention.

LOCAL INTEREST

Local resident involved.
See the red star.

★

Some districts and agencies use larger-than-standard envelopes for news release mailings. The U.S. Post Office is becoming more particular about this and you would be wise to check with your local postmaster before using any odd-size material for mailing. It could be classified as **nonstandard** in size or shape and be returned for a **mailing surcharge.**

Whether odd-size envelopes, bold stamps or other gimmicks, the purpose is to lead the reader to what is inside the envelope. In the final analysis it is the quality of the material inside that pays off. By constantly producing quality material you'll develop a reputation in the mind of editors and station managers. They will recognize your envelope (plain or not) and have confidence that what's inside will be well-written, grammatically correct, nearly edit-free and of interest to their readers, listeners and viewers.

Chapter 3
When Things Get Hot—
Crisis Handling

Despite all your planning, despite all your work with the media, despite your careful cultivation of a professional working relationship, there will still be events which strain or tax that two-way cooperation. It may be a strike, a controversial board meeting, an aroused parent group or one of a number of other problems. You need a well-developed plan of action to meet crisis periods. You need to:

- Have a media policy worked out in advance. Clearly spell out who will be the spokesperson to the media. Make it clear that no one else may speak for the schools or agency.
- Route all media calls to one person, or at least to one office.
- Prepare a statement covering the particular crisis situation. When media inquiries come in, read or distribute the statement to them. This will help maintain consistency of comments.
- Anticipate media questions and prepare and rehearse answers to them. Play devil's advocate and develop answers to all the touchy questions you can.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." It's a lot better than being caught in a lie. Promise an answer within a specific time if possible and follow through.
- Be brief. Don't cloud the issue with reams of data, or superfluous information. Keep comments to the point, and keep reiterating them.
- Start a rumor control center if the situation warrants it. Publish a phone number for members of the public to call if they hear a rumor or need information.
- Consider a special unlisted number for media representatives to call in case traffic is heavy on your regular lines.
- Keep total staff—professional and "professional support staff"—informed with inside information. They have a major stake in the outcome of any crisis. When media start reporting on trouble in the schools, community members will probably call friends who work in the schools to get "the real

story." If staff members know what's happening, each one becomes a valuable part of the rumor control center.

- Put a crisis team together. One person cannot handle a crisis alone. Delegate and clearly designate responsibilities to others.
- Keep calm and maintain a professional manner. Many questions from the media will be designed to break down your answers. Reporters will ask the same question several ways to try to elicit contradictory answers. Speak the truth slowly, calmly and consistently; repeat your facts.

Chapter 4
Working With Radio, Television And Cable TV

Up to this point we have provided information on working with the total mass media—preparing material for radio, press and television. There are, however, some special techniques needed to secure coverage of your schools or agency by the electronic media. You need to consider the use of these media:

- **Radio and TV:** To provide quick, instantaneous ways to get in touch with your publics.
- **Radio:** To use radio successfully you must think sound.
- **Television** is a visual medium as well as sound for the major part. To use television successfully you must think visual.

Planning for Radio . . .

Think sound for radio. If you make a tape recording of the featured luncheon speaker as well as write a synopsis of the pro-

gram you have a first-rate radio news story. Taped interviews of parents after a parent-teacher conference add color to your story that such conferences are being held. Grandparents' comments while visiting the schools and describing the changes they see, will add interest to a story about involvement of senior citizens in your schools. Use natural background sounds when possible, record on site and help listeners feel they were there!

- Listen to local telephone call-in shows. Topics of community interest and leads for future stories often surface here first. Have school personnel serve as guests on a local telephone call-in program answering community questions about schools. Have the superintendent schedule a weekly call-in show—starting with an overview by him/her of school or agency news.
- Visit your local station with ideas or program plans. Suggest people and programs you could develop for 15- or 30-minute shows.
- Develop a daily or weekly report of school news using a student reporter.
- Develop activities between radio stations' staff and the local schools. Often local stations will send a team to play school faculty or varsity in basketball or softball. Money raised from ticket sales for the events goes to the school or a special charity.
- Arrange for the local station to broadcast varsity games—of girls and boys.
- Develop plans for the station to broadcast 60-second PSAs about your schools or agency. Prepare 30 or 40 announcements on all different facets of school life and programs.
- For additional ideas on use of radio see Appendix E.

Planning For Television . . .

Like radio, television is an instantaneous medium and like radio it is also sound oriented. But the overriding factor for station managers, news directors or others working in TV is whether the material is interesting to watch. So, for television think **visual.**

- When sending material to the TV station consider several color slides (35mm). Send only horizontal pictures, no vertical ones and make sure the material is centered—TV projectors don't show the entire slide.

- Think of stories for television with a concern for color and movement as well as news and interest.
- If you are suggesting coverage from a TV station for an activity, remember that TV crews travel heavy and need time to set up equipment. Many stations are now equipped with mini-cameras and mobile units, but scheduling and careful timing is essential.
- TV crews need space in which to work, to move right up to the newsworthy idea whether it is a speaker, group, student or class. Keep this in mind when making suggestions about what and where they should cover a story.
- In planning for TV don't overlook the possibility of shooting your own film (usually 8mm). Discuss this with your local station managers before beginning the project, however.
- Don't overlook the use of video-tape. A video-tape of a reading class, students in vocational training classes, a debate in a civics class, make exciting programs not only for local television, but for district speakers to show at programs with the chamber of commerce, parent groups, etc. Explore the use of video-tape programs with local station managers.

Public Service Announcements

All radio and television stations run public service announcements (PSAs) interspersed throughout the broadcast day. Similar to the community calendar announcement mentioned previously, PSAs are made on tape for radio—check the size tape with your local stations--and on video-cassette in color or black and white for TV stations. Usually radio and TV station crews will assist you in developing PSAs. They would rather have them right!

Writing For Radio Or TV

Writing news releases was discussed earlier in this booklet but there are a few techniques unique to preparing material for radio and television.

- Keep it simple. Viewers and listeners don't have the luxury of rereading a paragraph they didn't quite understand the first time.
- Write the way you talk. Use small words. Vary sentence lengths. Complete sentences aren't always a necessity. Punc-

tuation isn't as important as in printed media. An **elipsis** (. . .) to a news person means **pause**—often it's used in place of a semicolon or period.

• Repeat the place and time at least once in a 30-second announcement and twice in a 60-second announcement.

• Be careful using parentheses in the body of a release. Parentheses are a sign to an announcer to skip over the enclosed material without reading it. One exception follows:

—Spell difficult names phonetically within parentheses right after they occur. Example: Kinasewutz (Kin-AZZuh-witz).

• Remember that a broadcast release will be read aloud. Avoid tongue twisters, lots of S sounds in a row, and complicated words.

• For PSAs or timing copy, use these approximate guidelines:

—for 10 seconds of copy use 25 words
—for 30 seconds use 75 words
—for 60 seconds use 150 words

• Read the release out loud to make sure it sounds as good as it reads!

Don't Overlook Cable Television (CATV)

Born in the '40s as a way that remote areas could get television reception, cable television (CATV) has blossomed. It still provides the improved reception offered by its early efforts, but today's CATV has potential for much more.

Some CATV systems bring 30, 60 or 100 and more different channels of information into subscribing homes in the community. In many communities, franchise requirements dictate that the schools be wired up to receive and transmit material over cable. An increasing number of schools and agencies are taking advantage of CATV in their mass media programs.

• **BERKS TV,** the cable company in Reading, Pa., began cooperating with local schools in the early '60s. They cablecast all Mount Penn High School basketball games, and even followed them to the division championships 400 miles away in Pittsburgh.

• **Willingboro (N.J.) Public Schools** have made extensive use of CATV to cablecast local school board meetings and in-service programs which teachers can "attend" from home.

• **The Natrona County (Wyo.) Public Library** offers a video reference service (VRS) using CATV. A subscriber calls the library to request some form of visual information. The librarian finds the material and places it under a television camera. The patron can review the material from home.

• **Over a Rollins Cablevision** system the Cranford and North Haven (Conn.) Public Schools have their own channel for contact with their communities. The channel shows news, menus, school events and other material on a continuous basis, punctuated by live or recorded student presentations from time to time.

Cable television operators are most receptive to working with local schools or agencies since such cooperation boosts subscribers to their services. In expanding an information program to CATV you will want to investigate ways to produce programs direct from the schools or at the CATV studios.

Chapter 5
Evaluation

The classic technique for evaluating a mass media communication program has been to count column inches of news coverage in the press and tabulate minutes of air time over radio and television. This continues to be effective, but a full evaluation of your program should include much more.

• Did the program stay within your budget and was it cost effective? Are you getting your money's worth?

• How many of the news releases you prepared were used in the papers, on radio and television? Keep records showing what and when you mailed the copy to the media and when and where and if it was used. This information is also helpful if someone later asks to whom a particular story was mailed and if it was used.

• Did your media program address the long term goals of your school or agency?

• How has your program been received in the community? Conduct a community poll through your own newsletter, newspaper ads, telephone canvas, direct interview or informally through a chain of people in the community to see if community residents feel they are being informed about their schools or agency. Ask which media they use to get their information—newspapers (which ones?), radio or television (which stations?).

• Take a survey of the mass media you are sending stories to and ask them to respond to questions regarding the material they receive. Are they getting what they need? Are they receiving it in a timely fashion? What would they like to receive in the future?

• Evaluate trends of your news release usage to see if the stories are being printed or used. This evaluation will provide you not only with an analysis of the media coverage of your schools or agency, but will serve as valuable feedback. For instance:

—Your board of education may be taking steps to eliminate the drama department in the next school year. However, your information shows that stories about district dramatic presentations have received heavy media coverage. This feedback information indicates strong community support for the drama program and suggests that the board might need to reconsider its decision.

Evaluation is a continual process in all mass media programs —you need to test, evaluate . . . test and evaluate. You need to make certain that all potential publics are getting the information they need. And in the case of the mass media—all the information and cooperation they want and expect from the schools or agency.

Chapter 6
Summary

To assure a successful mass media program you should:

1. Identify the media that serve your community.
2. Meet editors and station managers. Tell them what you have to offer and find out what they need from you.
3. Research story ideas, collect facts and select the best angle for your story.
4. Prepare stories, tip sheets and announcements about your schools for press, radio and television.
5. Pretest key news releases to be certain that they "do" what you want them to "do."
6. Select appropriate media for each story—taking into account the impact of the story and whether it lends itself best to writing, listening or viewing—or all three.
7. Distribute the story to selected media and keep records of who got what and when to help evaluate your program.
8. Anticipate media reaction. Have answers ready in advance to tough questions.
9. Innovate in your choice of media and use a variety of ways to get your message out.
10. Evaluate how well you've carried out your mass media program and make necessary changes or refinements.
11. Communicate your successes and difficulties to your superintendent and/or board of education members. Only in this way can you get continued support for your program.
12. Congratulate all who have helped you get your job done —editors and reporters, secretaries, teachers, students, administrators. A short note of congratulations or thanks can pay dividends in long-term friendships and support for your program.

APPENDIX A

REGION 10 EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER

FACT SHEET

P. O. Box 1300
400 East Spring Valley
Richardson, Texas 75080
(214) 231-6301

WHAT IS THE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER?

One of Texas' 20 regional institutions designed to assist school districts through cooperative efforts ranging from long-range planning to short-term problem solving.

WHERE IS THE CENTER LOCATED?

The Center is housed in a 57,000 square-foot building located on 6.6 acres in Richardson, Texas, at 400 East Spring Valley Road at Abrams, just two miles north of the LBJ Freeway (I-635) and one mile east of Central Expressway (U. S. 75).

WHY WAS THE CENTER CREATED?

To provide educational opportunities available ANYwhere to children EVERYwhere.

WHO DOES IT SERVE?

Students and faculties in 81 school districts in eight North Central Texas counties: Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, and Rockwall.

DO ALL CENTERS OFFER THE SAME SERVICES?

A center well-tuned to the needs of its own area designs services to fill the voids evident to administrators and teachers in the region. There is considerable variation among the programs offered in the 20 regions.

WHO WORKS AT THE CENTER?

About 230 people--professional and supportive. Professional staff members serve as consultants providing leadership in the region with emphasis on the new, the alive, and in bringing more vitality into the classroom.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF FUNDING AND WHO PAYS THE BILL?

The funding of Region 10 is comprised of monies from local, state, and federal revenues. State funds continue to be the primary source of monies to provide services to local education agencies. ESC funding is divided: Local, 41.0%; State and Federal, 59.0%.

WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER OFFER?

Administrative Services:

Serving the administrator in such areas as long-range planning, accreditation, job definitions, self-evaluations of local schools, school board policy development, community education, management study, and wherever else the need arises.

Offering Region-Wide Educational Opportunities

APPENDIX B

★ Education News Tip Sheet ★

March 1980

- THE SCHOOL THAT WORKS—In Chicago, they call it "the school that works." It's a huge public elementary school in one of the city's poorest ghettos, yet its 8th-graders score among the top 10 schools in the city on the annual, standardized reading test. Not a single 8th grader has been sent to the principal's office for disorderly conduct. Attendance by its 1,100 pupils and their teachers runs about 95%. There is not a speck of spray paint on its walls. The 78 white children rode buses to this previously all-black school last summer for a special program. It's Beasley Academic Center. CONTACT: William McNerney, Principal, 5255 S. State St., Chicago, IL 60609. Telephone 312: 567-5374.

- COMMUNITY EFFORT TO SOLVE DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS—Reaching beyond parents is the idea in Atlanta, Ga., where the whole community is brought into the effort to solve disciplinary problems. The plan includes schoolwide and citywide advisory councils composed of PTA presidents, community leaders, politicians and other local agency and organization heads. When necessary, groups from these councils actually go into the schools and work with administrators and teachers, although the primary function is visiting homes to discuss school problems and concerns with parents. The council also works with law enforcement services, and continues to follow up on students who have re-entered school. CONTACT: Dr. Chuck Fuller, Director of Planning & Management, 2930 Forrest Hills Dr., S.W., Atlanta, GA 30315. Telephone 404: 761-5411.

- ENERGY FROM A CUBE—In the Energy Room at School #33 in Rochester, N.Y., a student can stop in for a vigorous spin of a crank that operates a model generator. That's just one attraction in a special room set up as part of a cooperative program between education and business interests to motivate and prepare students—especially those from the inner city—for higher educational programs and for technical careers with local firms. The program called CUBE (Cooperation: University, Business, Education) is funded with a $97,000 grant from the business community. CONTACT: Larry Maynard, Project CUBE, City School District, 131 W. Broad St., Rochester, NY 14608. Telephone 716: 325-4560.

- ANOTHER KIND OF HOMEWORK—For parents who say, "I've tried to work with my child at home, but I'm no teacher," the Newport News (Va.) Public Schools have an answer. Parents of more than half of the district's 2500 3rd graders get letters inviting them to attend one of a series of five workshops to tell them what is being done in the schools to teach reading and mathematics and what they can do at home to help. So that everybody has a chance to attend, the one-hour "homework" sessions for parents are spread around the city and alternate morning and evening sessions. CONTACT: Corlas S. Plowman, Public Information Coordinator, Newport News Public Schools, 12456 Warwick Blvd., Newport News, VA 23606. Telephone 804: 599-4411.

- IT'S COOL TO BE SMART—The Plainfield (N.J.) School District has launched a program to boost enthusiasm for learning and to upgrade scholastic standards, which features a Parent-as-Partner contract that lets parents know their role in the process. English and math courses have been strengthened, and the school has started various developmental and remedial programs. CONTACT: Superintendent Evan S. Gillingham, Plainfield School District, 504 Madison Ave., Plainfield, NJ 07060. Telephone 201: 753-3155.

A monthly news service about schools • Virginia Ross, Editor • National School Public Relations Association, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209, (703) 528-5840 • Publishers of EDUCATION USA

APPENDIX C

How Do I Get My Good News To The Media?

- Newsworthy items should be brought to the attention of reporters by letter, telephone call or the news tip sheet shown below on this page. Be sure to send the tip sheet well ahead of the deadline for the newsworthy event so newspapers can schedule their photographers to show up if need be.
- Make sure the names in your news tip sheet are complete (first and last name). Always include a return telephone number on the tip sheet.
- Send your potential news items to all the media that provide regular coverage in your area. The media understands you are giving everyone an opportunity to become involved in your significant event.

News Tip Sheet

Name of School _____ Date _____

Who _____

What _____

Why _____

When _____

Where _____

How _____

Picture Possibilities _____

Contact person/s for more information _____

_____

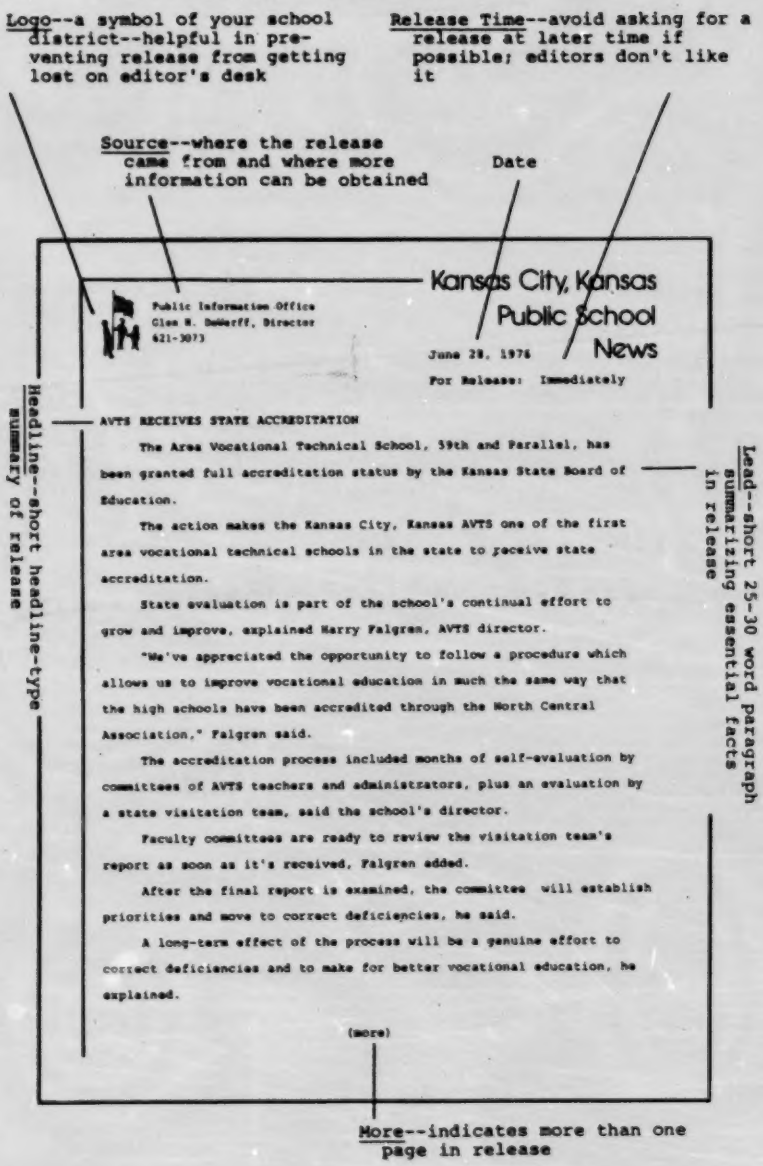
Comments _____

_____

SAMPLE

APPENDIX D

Sample News Release Form


Logo--a symbol of your school district--helpful in preventing release from getting lost on editor's desk
Release Time--avoid asking for a release at later time if possible; editors don't like it
Source--where the release came from and where more information can be obtained
Date
Public Information Office
Glen H. Dunerff, Director
621-3073
Kansas City, Kansas
Public School
News
June 28, 1976
For Release: Immediately
Headline--short headline-type summary of release
AVTS RECEIVES STATE ACCREDITATION
Lead--short 25-30 word paragraph summarizing essential facts in release
The Area Vocational Technical School, 59th and Parallel, has been granted full accreditation status by the Kansas State Board of Education.
The action makes the Kansas City, Kansas AVTS one of the first area vocational technical schools in the state to receive state accreditation.
State evaluation is part of the school's continual effort to grow and improve, explained Harry Falgren, AVTS director.
"We've appreciated the opportunity to follow a procedure which allows us to improve vocational education in much the same way that the high schools have been accredited through the North Central Association," Falgren said.
The accreditation process included months of self-evaluation by committees of AVTS teachers and administrators, plus an evaluation by a state visitation team, said the school's director.
Faculty committees are ready to review the visitation team's report as soon as it's received, Falgren added.
After the final report is examined, the committee will establish priorities and move to correct deficiencies, he said.
A long-term effect of the process will be a genuine effort to correct deficiencies and to make for better vocational education, he explained.
(more)
More--indicates more than one page in release

APPENDIX E

How to properly use radio in assisting your school district to tell the school story:

- Use radio for key emergency announcements concerning your school system (snow emergencies, early closings, late openings, disease epidemics, etc.) Publicize widely in your community what station(s) will carry "official" school announcements and work out a code arrangement with station personnel to avoid crank calls.

- Spot announcements: Utilize radio for 10, 20, 30 or 60 second spot announcements concerning some particular aspect of your school district program (board of education meeting dates, holiday schedules, open house nights, dramatic and athletic events, honors programs, PTA meetings, etc.).

- Vignette shows: Use radio to highlight in short, punchy vignette broadcasts (no more than 10 minutes, preferably five minutes) concerning activities of the school district. (Such things as new or improved curriculum changes, explanations of board of education actions, the hiring of new administrative personnel (especially new superintendents), new instructional programs (especially those dealing with so-called 'hot' or controversial topics such as sex education, family planning courses, behavioral adjustment courses).

- In-depth programs: Once a month (or more often) half-hour productions devoted to an in-depth analysis of the various broad program activities of your school district (guidance counseling, vocational education, distributive education, office work experience, classes for the handicapped or gifted, classes for remedial or retarded students, etc.).

- Live board of education broadcasts: Encourage a commercial station in your community, or the school radio station itself, to broadcast live sessions of the board of education so that your citizens will be able to hear first hand the key decisions and deliberations of the board of education.

- Systemwide inservice programming: If your school system operates its own radio station (or TV station) utilize this facility to hold systemwide faculty meetings where the members of the board of education or key administrators can talk directly to teachers in their individual buildings. Consider establishing remote hookups so that a feedback process would be possible from one or more assembly centers.

- Spot News: This is the last useful way to use radio and it is a process the radio newsman will utilize himself to get reaction, statements, explanations, or answers to key questions making news in your district and community.

Things to keep in mind when considering using (or increasing) your use of radio facilities:

- Radio stations deal in seconds, and cannot use long statements and statements filled with "educationese" on the air. If you have a major announcement to make, issue a news release for the print media, but boil it down to the key ingredients (60 seconds or less) for use by radio.

- Remember that radio broadcasters (as are all journalists) are generally trying to answer six key questions in any story they air. These are "Who, What, When, Where, Why and How." Make sure the Five W's and the H are answered in all broadcast news releases.

- Never fail to cooperate (as best you can) with a radio (or any) newsman. It's easy to say "no comment" to a tough question, but all that does is to permit the other side of a controversial issue to get the full air time and your side of the story does not get told.

- Get to know broadcast newsmen on a professional, first-name basis. Most news stories get distorted because of a lack of understanding of the newsman, not by design.

- Remember that radio is "now" journalism and, generally, does not engage in indepth reporting as do the better and more precise newspapers. Don't get "up-tight" if radio carries only part of what you consider to be a major

APPENDIX E . . . continued

story concerning your school district. Respect the radio newsman's judgement on what is significant about board actions or activities inside the school district.

- Don't attempt to mislead radio broadcasters concerning breaking news happenings in your school system. Give them the facts as you understand them, even if it is, in your opinion, a story which will not enhance the district's image.

Some other key "don'ts:"

- Don't attempt to utilize radio (or any news media) to further personal or political goals.

- Don't plead, beg or threaten in an attempt to get what you consider "better" air time for school-related shows. A good presentation in the public interest will get good air time, so concentrate on making your production "listenable" and you'll get that good time. (For radio, key times are the so-called "drive hours"—7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.)

- Don't use alphabet soup in making radio announcements. Listeners don't understand such terms as "EMR," of "voc-ed" or a multitude of other commonly used schools terms. Talk to listeners in plain, straightforward, everyday English.

The main business of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), formed in 1935, is to help bring about better citizen understanding of the objectives, accomplishments, and needs of schools. NSPRA's mission is to build support for education through responsible public relations and communication.

If the duties of your position call for communicating with the public or others in the field of education, NSPRA membership is a must for you. NSPRA member services include: *PARAGRAPHS* (member newsletter), Public Relations Resource Center, Research Assistance, PR Hotline Counseling Service, Personnel Clearinghouse, National Representation, reduced rates for members at NSPRA's annual National Seminar and a voluntary accreditation program. There are four categories of NSPRA membership: institutional, professional, associate, and student.

Other NSPRA Products, Services and Activities include: *EDUCATION USA, IT STARTS IN THE CLASSROOM* and *FEDERAL FUNDING ALERT* newsletters; workshops and consulting services; special publications and audiovisual materials.

To order additional titles of "*Basic School PR Guides,*" or to obtain information about NSPRA membership, products and services, contact: National School Public Relations Association, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209, (703) 528-5840.